A

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TO A

FRIEND

IN [illegible]SHIRE, &c.

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In *LANCASHIRE*,

Occasioned by a

REPORT,

a Concerning 17

Injunctions, and *Prohibitions*,

by *AUTHORITY*;

Relating to some Points of RELIGION, now in Debate.

LONDON,
Printed for *John Baker*, at the *Black Boy* in *Pater-Noster-Row*. 1714. Price 3 *d*.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND In LINCOLNSHIRE,

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LONDON,

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A LETTER

To a Friend in *Lancashire*,

Occasioned by a *Report*, concerning *Injunctions* and *Prohibitions* by *Authority*; &c.

SIR,

YOUR *Last Letter* expresseth a much greater *Concern* than I have ever discover'd in You upon any other account. You tell me, that you have assurances from many in your Parts, whose Intelligence is very good, that there is certainly a Design on foot, amongst the *Right Reverend*

Reverend Fathers of our *Church*, to procure from the *Civil Authority*, such *Directions*, *Injunctions*, or *Prohibitions*, as may effectually put a ſtop to the *Debates*, which have been of late reviv'd concerning the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*. Upon which, You Expoſtulate with an unuſual warmth: You declare the *Proteſtant Cauſe*, (conſider'd as diſtinct from the *Popiſh*,) to be left deſtitute of all Support; and You conclude, at laſt, *Tell it not in Gath, publiſh it not in the Streets of Aſcalon!*

I do not at all wonder, that You abound in *thoſe* Parts with all ſuch *Reports* and *Stories*, as carry any Reflexion along with them upon the *Proteſtant Cauſe*. You are *there*, perfectly ſurrounded with *Thoſe*, whoſe buſineſs it is to invent, propagate, and improve, every thing of that ſort: As we have multitudes about this *great City*, to help forward the ſame Work; and to diſtract the Minds of Men from ſeeing or improving the preſent glorious View of publick Happineſs, which God hath wonderfully placed before our Eyes. Nor do I wonder That You, being perſuaded of the *Truth* of the *Report*, ſhould

ſhould grow warm within at the uneaſy thought of ſuch a procedure; becauſe I know you to be a follower of *Chriſt*, and not of any *Maſter* upon *Earth*; and a *Proteſtant* entirely upon that avowed Principle of *proteſtantiſm*, *viz.* that *All Men have a* Right to *conſult the* Scriptures, *as the Rule of their own Faith and practice: Which* I have heard you often affirm *they cannot be, unleſs a perfect* Liberty *be left for debating their* True ſenſe, *in* all points, *and at* all times equally.

But You will excuſe me, if I do not expreſs the ſame Warmth of Concern, upon the ſame Occaſion; when I tell you that I am ſo far from believing the *Truth* of the *Report*, that I cannot help being confident that it is *one* of thoſe numerous *Inventions*, with which our *Popiſh Adverſaries* are continually at this time loading our *Cauſe*, and keeping up the *Spirits* of All in their *Intereſt*: which, I muſt tell you, would not be at the heighth They now are at, without the greateſt *Art*, and *Management*.

Can I poſſibly admit it into my thoughts, that my *Lords* the *Biſhops*, than whom

no

no Men, upon that *Bench*, ſince the *Reformation*, ever more thoroughly underſtood the *Cauſe* of *Religion*; or ſtrenuouſly oppoſed every degree of *Popery* and *Antichriſtianiſm*: Can I ever believe that *Perſons* of ſuch Underſtanding, and ſuch Integrity, can poſſibly be embark'd in ſuch a Deſign, which muſt in effect deſtroy the weight of all their own *Arguments* againſt the *Church* of *Rome*; and not only weaken, but root up the foundation of the *Reformation* it ſelf? Far be it from me, to entertain even the *ſuſpicion* of it. Their *Lordſhips* underſtand the *Grounds* of *Proteſtantiſm* too well, to think of ſuch *methods*. And the undeniable Evidence of ſuch *Arguments*, as We have often diſcourſed over, is too clear to *Them*, I verily believe, ever to permit them to attempt the remedy of any imagined *Evil Conſequences*, at the Expence of the *Chriſtian Cauſe* it ſelf.

If, when we write againſt the *Papiſts*, it be true, that *Points*, tho' ſettled by all *Eccleſiaſtical Authority*, may and ought to be freely diſcuſſed and debated: ſhall it not be true, when *We* our ſelves are concern'd?

If

If We are glad, in all our Debates with *Them*, to fly to the *Scriptures*, and to declare *Them* to be the *Rule* of *Faith*: Shall We not permit that *Liberty* to all others, which *We* can only claim, as it is the *Common Right* of all *Christians*, and not as any thing appropriated to our selves?

If the *Scriptures* be the *Rule* of my *Faith*, indeed and not in words only: How can it be so, if I be not to judge for my self, what is in it, and what is not? For, if the *Determinations* of others, are to bind me up, or tie me down, to such a particular *Interpretation*; then, it is not the *Scripture*, which is the *Rule* of my *Faith*; but those *Determinations* of others.

If the *Scripture* be the *Rule* of *Faith*; and upon this very account, an *Appeal* constantly to be made to it: How can this be done, if *Debates* and *Enquiries* are suppres'd?

If it be the *Rule* of *Faith*, it must be so equally in *all* points. If not in *all* points; then in *no* point. And, if in *all*; how can any one or more points

be excepted, without giving up the whole? or declaring, that it shall be our *Rule* or not our *Rule*, as *We* think fit?

If We be not *infallible* in *all* things; we are not *infallible* in any *one*. And so reciprocally, if in any *one*; then are we equally infallible in *all*. But *Infallibility* is laugh'd out of Countenance, in all our Disputes with the *Romanists*. How is it possible then, to except any one *Article*, or *Point*, out of the Number; without recurring to That Infallibility, which We so justly explode? Can it possibly be affirmed, that, tho' We are not infallible in *all* our decisions; yet in *this* We are: and therefore ordain, that no farther Light, can, or shall, break in upon us?

If we be not *infallible*, We may *err*. If we may *err*; we may *err* in all points, equally. If in *all* points; then in any *one* particular point. And so, if we allow Debates, and Enquiries, in any; there is no remedy: We are obliged, in Conscience, to allow them in *all*.

If

If the whole *Proteſtant Cauſe* be ſo entirely built upon this, that it could never have ſubſiſted in the World, but by calling all private Perſons to the *Scriptures* themſelves; and perſuading Them to labour after a Right underſtanding of them: How can this ſame *Cauſe* poſſibly be defended, without the ſame allowance in *all* Caſes equally, of an *Appeal* to *them*, about the true meaning of the ſame *Scriptures*? Or, was that *Method* only a ſort of *Scaffolding* in *Religion*; to be pull'd down again, as ſoon as the *Fabric* was erected to our Mind?

If the *Scripture* be the *Rule* of *Faith*, in *all* things; then, all *Chriſtians* have a *Right* to conſult, and debate about the true meaning of this *Rule*, in *any* particular point. And, if ſo; then, what is it to except *any* particular point out of the Number; and to declare that, about *this*, there ſhall be no farther *Debates*, but all ſhall acquieſce in the *ſettled Interpretation* of the *Texts* that relate to it: What, is this, I ſay, but to ſay that the *Scripture* is not the *Rule* of *Faith* to private Perſons in this particular point?

If it be conſtantly objected againſt the *Romaniſts*, as the greateſt Evil, that They ſhut up the *Scriptures* from their *People*; and only diſh out to Them ſuch *Doctrines* as Themſelves pleaſe: How ſhall *We* ever be able to object this again; or to inſiſt upon the Wickedneſs of it; if We our ſelves, as to this *one* point, do the very ſame? I ſay, *the very ſame*. For, what is it to ſuppreſs all *Debates* about the True meaning of the *Texts*, relating to one *Article*; but, in truth, to *ſhut up* thoſe particular *Texts*, as effectually, as if they were not in Being? And what is it to *ſhut up* any particular *Texts*, but to declare in effect that we have a Right to ſhut up *all*, whenever We ſee fit?

When *Texts* of *Scripture* are in words propoſed to us, with ſuch a particular Interpretation affix'd to Them; and ſuch a particular *Doctrine* deduced from them; and no allowance for *Debates* about Them: Can they be ſaid, any more properly, to be *Texts* of *Scripture* for our Uſe; than if theſe *Interpretations*, or *Doctrines*, were given out to us, without *Them*? And, do not the *Words* of *Scripture*, in this method,

method, become only a *Form*, for *Decency* and *Ceremony* ſake?

If the *Papiſts* decree You ſhall not debate the meaning of thoſe words, *This is my Body*, but take them, according to the *Determinations* of their *Church*, to ſignify a *Change* into *Chriſt's Natural Body*, without any farther *Enquiries*; and the *Proteſtants* declare this to be *Unchriſtian* and *Unwarrantable*: With what Grace can They themſelves afterwards decree, that tho' this be ſo unchriſtian, in *this* point, or any other that We our ſelves do not admit; yet, in the *Doctrine* of the *Trinity*, it is very juſt, and right, and very Chriſtian, to ordain, that no one ſhall diſpute about any particular *Text* relating to *this*; either, whether it be found in any *Manuſcript*; or, ſuppoſing it genuine, what is the True meaning of it? Let the things be placed together in the *light* of *Compariſon*; And then, let the *difference* of *procedure* be found out, if poſſible?

Is it *Truth*, or *Falſhood*, we deſire to preſerve? If it be *Truth*; it ſtands not in

in need of such *Methods*. If *Falsehood*, it ought not to be taken care of.

Is it *Truth*, or *Falsehood*, we desire to guard against? If *Falsehood*; this *Method* is rather likely to make it pass for *Truth*, when it is not permitted to shew it self. If *Truth*; then are we Self-condemned. Or rather, Remove all *Debates*; and *Truth* and *Falsehood*, are only so many *Syllables* put together, signifying no more than *Established*, and *not Established*.

If it be said, that it is reasonable to suppose *such points* well settled after so many Years possession; the *Papists* must have the advantage, in this Argument; who have so much greater *length* of *Time*, to justify their most absurd *Tenets*; besides that They must be now, *True* or *False*, just what they *were* at the beginning of the *Reformation*, when they were settled: unless *Time* can alter those *Two* properties; or turn *fallible* Men into *Infallible*. It is allowed that no one *Interpretation* of any *Text*, or Doctrine drawn from it, can be *settled infallibly*. And therefore, whatever it be, it *may be* false: and therefore, it is always certain,

certain, it may and ought to be examined. Especially, this must hold good in all *Points* of a *Nice* and Extraordinary nature, settled all at once, before there could be opportunity for Exact and Diffusive *Enquiries*.

Is it all at last to be resolved into *Peace*, and *Quiet*? This removes *Truth* or *Falshood*, out of the *Question*. And, if this be a good *Argument* for *Civil Discouragements*, and *Prohibitions*; then Blessed be the *Inquisition*, which most effectually keeps all things quiet: and Blessed be that *Stupidity*, and *Ignorance*, which flourisheth under such discipline. Let us recall *these* into the World: and all will be as silent, as *Desolation* it self. But, indeed, We know how to give a *substantial Answer* to this, when the *Papists* urge this. We can reply to *Them*, "This is a false Notion of the *Peace* "of the *Church*: which consists not in "the *Unity* of *Profession*, but the *Unity* "of *Affection*. God requires of us, to "search into his *Truths*: and we are "to be judg'd at last, by our own Judg-"ments. We have a *Right* to be born "with, in our Differences of Opini-"on from one another. For the *Event*; "We leave it to God. But We think "nothing

" nothing can preſerve a True *Peace*,
" but the *Allowance* of *Mutual Debates*;
" and the *Exerciſe* of *Mutual Forbearance*.
" *This* ends in *Charity*. The other *Me-*
" *thod*, beſides the making *Truth* and
" *Falſhood*, and all *Religions* equal, pro-
" motes *Peace* only by promoting *Ig-*
" *norance*; and conſults *Quiet*, at beſt,
" no otherwiſe, than as the deſtroying
" all *Civil Liberty*, prevents Tumults. The
" *Remedy*, beſides the *Scandal* to *Religion*,
" is worſe then the *Diſeaſe*. Nay, it is
" but a partial Unequal *Remedy*. It could
" not prevent the *Reformation*, (which
" was a terrible Breach of the *peace* of the
" *Church*, in the *Romaniſt*'s Opinion)
" nor many other leſſer Efforts. It falls
" hard upon none, but ſuch honeſt Souls
" as will ſtill dare to ſpeak what they think
" *Truth* and *Right*. But it is a Glo-
" rious Advantage to All, who are more
" concern'd about *Preferments*, than about
" *True Religion*.

This, and much more, can *We* ſay, when the *Papiſts* preclude us from all *Religious Debates*, under the poor pretence of *Peace* and *Quiet*. Let us apply this to our ſelves, in God's Name:

or,

or, let us give up our Cauſe: which muſt have ſunk in it's very infancy, if this *Argument* had been good in it ſelf; or thought good by *Us*.

How much more might be added? And, can You poſſibly imagine, that my *Lords* the *Biſhops*, who have the cleareſt View of what is of importance to the *Proteſtant Cauſe*; and, what is more, who are truly *Chriſtians*, not to be moved to promote *Truth* it ſelf by any method, which *Chriſt* himſelf never pointed out to them: Can you poſſibly think, that ſuch Men; *Proteſtants*, and *Chriſtians*, with that *Venerable Good Man* at their Head, whoſe Life hath been worn away by his unwearied *Zeal* for the *Proteſtant Cauſe*; will ever conſent, either to give to *Popery*, in any *one* point, a freſh ſtrength, by inculcating an *Implicite Faith*; or to recede one ſtep from the *Spirit* of that *Goſpel*, by which They firmly expect to be judged.

No, my Friend, I hope *better things*: I believe *better things*: I am confident of *better things*. My *Lords* the *Biſhops* are as ſenſible, as any Men living,

" That the *Proteſtant Cauſe* muſt ſuffer " exceedingly in the World; when it is " ſtill obſerved that their *main and boaſt-* " *ed Principle*, is maintain'd and ce- " lebrated by them, only when they " are writing againſt *Popery*; but upon " any other occaſion, is utterly forſa- " ken and forgot by Themſelves. They know perfectly well

" That if We be not *infallible*, We " are *fallible*.

" That if We be *fallible*, We are *fal-* " *lible* in *all* points.

" That if We be *fallible* in *all* points, " We cannot poſſibly claim an *Indiſpu-* " *table Authority in any*.

" That if the Scripture be the *Rule* " of *Faith*; it muſt be ſo, in *all* points, " at *all* Times, to *all* Perſons, equally.

" That if it be ſo; it muſt *lie open* e- " qually, at *all* Times, to *all* Perſons, to " be enquired into in *all* points.

" That, if *Debates* be not allowed in " any

" any one, or more, particular *Points*, " about the right *Senſe of it*; it is in " thoſe *Points*, *ſhut up*, as an inacceſſible " *Arcanum*.

" That no Anſwer can be given to " the *Papiſts*, by Thoſe, who, in any " inſtances, or any degree, deny *That* to " others, which They themſelves claim " from *them*, as the *Common Right* of " *Chriſtians*.

" That any ſort of *Indiſputable Au-* " *thority*, call it what you pleaſe, is the " ſame, in effect, with Abſolute *Infal-* " *libility*; and every degree of *Submiſ-* " *ſion* to it, as *ſuch*, is the very ſame " with *Implicite Faith* and *Subjection*.

" That the *Peace* of the *Church*, in " any good Senſe, can never come in " competition with the *Common Right* " of *Chriſtians*, or their *Liberty* of de- " bating *Points* of *Religion*: But, in a " true Senſe, is *then* at its heighth, and in " its glory, when *Mutual Forbearance* flou- " riſheth; and not, when a *profound Si-* " *lence* is eſtabliſh'd.

" That

" That all *Parties*, and all *Perſons*, " ſee and own this to be the *Truth* of " *God*, when They themſelves are *un-* " *dermoſt*: And therefore, that they " muſt acknowledge it to be ſo, when " they are *uppermoſt*.

" That *Religion*, and every thing re- " lating to it, is a matter of *Choice*; and " not of *Force*.

" That the *Reformation* was wholly " founded upon our *common Right* to de- " bate about the *Senſe* of *Scripture*.

" That the *Chriſtian Religion* can ap- " prove of no method of propagating " *Truth*, contrary to This.

Theſe things, I ſay, are perfectly well known to my *Lords* the *Biſhops*. And That is enough to aſſure You, that your Neighbours the *Papiſts* have no reaſon to inſult You, upon what You will, I truſt, find to be a *Calumny* raiſed, and propagated, by their own Friends.

Believe me, Their *Lordſhips* have Good Senſe, Learning, Integrity, Zeal for

for the honour of Chriſtianity, as well as the Proteſtant Cauſe, in a moſt deſirable degree. They are *Chriſtians*; They are *Proteſtants*; They are *Britons*; They are the Supports of *True Liberty*: Which is but a Word in *Jeſt*, if the chief and moſt deſirable *Liberty* of a *Reaſonable Creature*, be either taken away, or broken in upon. And, therefore, I ſay, Depend upon it, It is not conceivable that Men of ſuch *Characters*, can eſpouſe a *Deſign*, of which I will ſay no more than I have already ſaid.

I am,

Your moſt ſincere Friend,

and humble Servant.

London, *Decemb.* 15
1714.

FINIS.

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